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Editor's Outlook

THE CIA, A VALUABLE SAFEGUARD

Congressional liberals, in the wake of the recent terrorist hijacking and President Reagan's angry answer to it, have come forward to criticize not only the Administration's handling of that crisis but no less the Central Intelligence Agency's secret operations, particularly in Central America and the Middle East. They feel that Mr. Reagan's diatribe against what he called "a confederation of terrorist States" engaged in "acts of war against the Government and people of the United States" may have satisfied his personal frustrations but open him to rejoinders of "hypocrisy" because of his assent to American espionage activities not too far removed from the "evil system" of Marxist exploitation.

What of a country, denouncing terrorism, that mines Nicaraguan harbors, shells Lebanon and supplies other lands with the sophisticated paraphernalia of war, or employs secret agents to overthrow established Governments, they ask? Further, they contend that the President is in conflict with his election promise to let the daylight in on all Washington functions, that he is acting in a manner little different from Richard Nixon's "imperial" White House — that is, denying the people's right to know.

Surely, Mr. Reagan is in an exposed position as Chief Executive with respect to this vital matter of espionage, especially since he has assumed a moralistic stance against Soviet stealth and subversion in the conduct of foreign affairs. But, we feel, it is to his credit that he has had the nerve to uphold CIA activities in strategic global areas. Whatever the sharp divisions of public opinion that have erupted over the hostage issue, it should not be overlooked that for the terrorists and their mentors the prime enemy is the West and its

civilization. And America is the "Great Satan" because it is the pre-eminent leader of the West.

Mr. Reagan faces the realities of this most hazardous situation when he regards the clandestine operations of the CIA as a necessary adjunct to the defense of the national interest. Ours is a world dark and stormy, as the wild assaults of the terrorists, their supporters and their would-be imitators attest, and it requires a specialized force of trained talent to meet the inflamed conditions of a world so torn.

The political fretting about terrorism and suitable responses to it appears to be based on the illogic that somehow the challenge will evaporate if only a few sinister leaders were disposed of. But that ignores the ugly fact that terrorism is a natural product of modern life with its easy availability to weapons of destruction, which offer unusual power to small groups of malcontents all over the world. In these scrambled circumstances of vulnerability, it is imperative that intelligence-gathering agencies function covertly to safeguard the national interest. And they cannot function effectively if their thrusts do not remain covert. There will be occasions — the Middle East is certainly one such — when the White House will be compelled to authorize decisions that would cause the United States and its Allies needless embarrassment if their rendering were made public.

The Cold War, unfortunately, is very much a part of international life despite the trumpeting about arms control and detente. And the CIA is a valuable instrument in the practices of espionage that are an intrinsic part of the Cold War. Without the CIA, our United States would be at hopeless disadvantage in the struggle to preserve a certain amount of freedom in the world. Ever since

Stalin made his aggressive moves westward, democratic nations have had to contend with an insidious force that operates by threat, murder and Orwellian deception.

Our country and those with us disarm themselves when they do not resist with every means at hand this Marxist contagion whose manipulators do not intend to rest until they have tunneled under every last stronghold of voluntary enterprise that exists in civilization as we know it.

Undoubtedly, Congressional supervision should be there to aid in supervising CIA activities, but regulation ought to be discreetly applied. An under-cover agency, whose work is essential to national security, can hardly bend to its task if it is subject to constant public airing. After all, testimony along the investigative line has revealed that the CIA seldom has taken significant or questionable actions without the approval of the President and the National Security Council.